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Narnaul: A Historical City

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Abstract: *Narnaul has an important place in history but in the time and circumstances its history was not highlighted that much but there is a need for the history of Narnaul to be highlighted. The monuments of Narnaul are awe-inspiring and important. These monuments are not only important for giving information about the past but they are our priceless heritage. The monuments of Narnaul are linked to our past and our sympathy towards them reflects our historical understanding. The conditions of the sites and monuments discussed in the article reflect the general attitude of the people. History, as a discipline that connects the past to the present, is concerned with the handing down of tradition. The administration has provided statutory protection to some structures but some buildings and their surrounding areas are becoming victims of illegal encroachment and vandalism. The monuments of Narnaul also have great importance in history, but compared to other cities, Narnaul was not given as much importance as it should have been given.*

Keywords: *Narnaul, Monuments, Bighota, Ahirwati, Dynasty, Tomb, Chhata, Mausoleum, Inscription, Arches, Gumbad, Octagonal, Rubble, Preserve.*

Introduction:

During the medieval period, different parts of the state of Haryana were called by different names depending on their geographical location. The area around Rewari was famous by the name of 'Bighota', which is called 'Ahirwati' in modern times. The area situated to its west was called 'Dhadoti' area, which was a sandy area extending from west to east. The area south of Bighota was famous by the name of 'Rath'¹, this area was the intermediate area south of Krishnavati river and west of Rewari. Most of this area has now gone into present-day Alwar district. Narnaul city was situated in this Rath region. The area immediately south-east of these areas was called 'Mewat'. In all the above mentioned areas, Rath area was very extensive. The intermediate area from the south-west of Krishnavati to the border of Rajasthan was called Nalvati.²

Narnaul is a city located in Mahendragarh district in the Indian state of Haryana. It is also the headquarters of the district, located between 27° 47' to 27° 28' latitude and 75° 76' to 76° 17' longitude. Its area is 922.34 square kilometers.³Bhiwani district is situated on its northern border, Kotputli and Jhunjhunu districts on its south-western border, Alwar district in the east and Rewari district in the south-east.⁴

The medieval town is situated at altitude. Almost all the houses and buildings here are medieval style mansions, these houses are made of stone, small bricks and lime. There were gates around the city which had different names like Delhi Gate, Western Gate, Southern Gate, Kanaud Gate etc. At present only the remains of one gate are safe, the rest have disappeared. Areas and markets like PuraniMandi (Gudri Bazaar), Purani Sarai, Nai Sarai, Chandwara, Mishrawara, Sarai Dusaran, Peeragah, Naya Bazaar, Pul Bazaar etc. belong to the medieval era. Their roads are narrow and steep and have stone floors. The city had more than 15stepwells and ponds, most of which have been destroyed.⁵ Narnaul city is full of medieval monuments and remains. Chhalak River, Dohan River and Krishnavati River are its main rivers. The city is situated on both banks of the Chhalak River. A bridge over the Chhalak River connects the two parts of the medieval city. Apart from these three major rivers, many rain drains join any one of the above mentioned rivers falling near them. These drains are known locally by the names of the villages from which they originate. All these rivers and streams were dependent on rain.

The climate of Narnaul region is hot and dry. This area is very close to Rajasthan; hence dust storms occur here during the summer season. Mountain ranges are characteristic of this region. These are part of the vast Aravalli mountain range. Minerals and metals are available in abundance in these and provide natural pasture for animals. Dhausi hill is the highest, its height is 2100 feet. The plains around the city are sandy and contain a large number of dunes. Lime, pebbles, stones and rocks are present on the surface.⁶

Historical Background

Narnaul is the headquarters of Mahendragarh district and is a historical town. The present Narnaul city came into existence in the second half of the 12th century.⁷ According to the Census of India, 1961, Punjab, "It is said that the town of Narnaul was settled on the Dhausi hills 900 years ago.⁸The original Narnaul site is confirmed by archaeological material, historical literature and popular legends. The remains of some ancient tombs at Dhausi Near the hill are located in the Kaldari Mosque, built in the early 12th century.⁹A large number of

remains of pottery and utensils buried earthen vessels filled with ashes of dead bodies, and some stone sculptures and inscriptions found at the ruined site, scattered building stones and remains of ancient Uttarapatha are the evidence of this ruined city presents a clear picture.¹⁰ In 1212 AD or 603 Hijri, when PirTurkman was sent away from Ajmer by his master brother Garib Nawaz MoinuddinChishti along with 5 companions for the Establishment of vilayet in the Narnaul, he reached near Dhausi mountain via the ancient Uttarapatha route. Thus, the original Narnaul city was situated on the ancient Uttarapatha route. Many step-wells and ponds were built on the ancient Uttarapatha route passing through the Narnaul region, the remains of which some still exist, such as the step-wells of Sirohi and Bhankri and the pond of Dhausi.¹¹

The history of the original Narnaul city goes back to the era of the early Vedic civilization of Haryana. For example, Maharishi Diptodik Ashram is situated to the west of Dhausi Hill, Maharishi Chyavan Ashram is situated on the top of Dhausi Hill and Maharishi Piplad Ashram and Maharishi Uddalak Ashram is situated on the banks of river Dohan near which were famous centers of education in the pre-Vedic period.¹² All these sages were of the Bhrigu dynasty. This also proves that the original Narnaul City was a well-known centre of education in ancient times. About the remains of these ashrams, M.L. Bhargava has mentioned the above things in his book 'Hemu and his era' based on AdiParva and Nava Parva of Mahabharata. However according to The Ancient Geography of India, 6000-5000 years ago the original Narnaul city and Narnaul area came under Bairath or MatsyaMahajanapada. The first historical mention of Bairath is found in the travelogue of the Chinese traveller Huan Tsang.¹³ According to the D.C. Sarkar, the ancient Bairath or Virat country was located in the Alwar-Jaipur-Bharatpur region, which was south of the Delhi region and east of the desert.¹⁴ During the reign of Harshvardhan, a Chinese traveller named Huansang also visited Naren (original Narnaul city) during his visit to India. He reached Naren from Kullu, Ropar, Sirhind, Samana, Tohana and Hansi between 635 AD to 637 AD.

After the disintegration of BairathMahajanapada in 1022 AD, the Narnaul area became a part of Bhadanak state. In 1180 AD, the state of Haryana was ruled by the Tomars, whose capital was Delhi. In 1180 AD, Prithviraj Chauhan abolished this Tomar state and merged it with Ajmer state. This fact is also confirmed by the book 'Pasanahcharu' written by Sridhar. Prithviraj Chauhan appointed Noonkaran as his feudal lord in the Narnaul region. It seems that Raja Noonkaran gave the shape of a city to MaujaNandigram and named it

"Naralon" after his wife 'Naralon', which later became "Narnaul" due to common parlance. This fact is confirmed by the inscription of Maharaja Sawai Jai Singh of Jaipur obtained from the ruins of Surya Narayan Temple, Narnaul, in which it is written that "Nandigram in Dwapar, Narnaul in Kaliyuga" i.e. Narnaul of modern times was Nandigram of ancient times.¹⁵

After the death of Firoz Shah Tughlaq in 1388 AD, the process of disintegration of the Delhi Sultanate started at a rapid pace. Taking advantage of this situation, BahadurNahir established the Khanzada dynasty in Mewat took control of the Narnaul area and made it a part of Mewat.¹⁶The descendants of BahadurNahir ruled as independent rulers till 1526 AD, although they enjoyed the title of Amir in the court of the Sultans. During the Khanzada rule, Narnaul city progressed the most and became a very prosperous and densely populated city.

With the first battle of Panipat on 21 April 1526 AD, the state of Mewat of which Narnaul was a part, sunset forever. In May 1529 AD, Babar appointed his confidant Ahsan Timur as his Faujdar in Narnaul and Majnoon-Khan-e-Kakshal as his Jagirdar. Even during the first reign of Humayun (1530 AD to 1540 AD), Majnoon-Khan-e-Kakshal was a vassal of Narnaul. Sher Shah Suri gave Narnaul the status of a Shiq (district) and appointed Haji Shah as Shiqdar there. Haji Shah expelled Majnun-khan-i-Quaqshal, the Jagirdar appointed by Humayun, from Narnaul.¹⁷Sher Shah Suri built a very beautiful and huge tomb in Pathan style under the supervision of Haji Shah in Narnaul at the tomb of his grandfather Ibrahim Khan Suri in 1543 AD. This tomb is situated in the centre of the medieval city of Narnaul. Sher Shah had also established a mint in Narnaul in which copper coins were minted. ShershahSuri had a special attachment to Narnaul and after becoming Sultan, he constructed 308 wells in Shimla village and built a stone wall around the village for security. About 100 wells and remains of walls still exist in Shimla village.¹⁸

Akbar gave the status of Sarkar to Narnaul and appointed a Nazim and Faujdar there made it a part of Mewat district and made Mewat district a district of Agra Subah. According to Ain-Akbari, Akbar separated Narnaul from Mewat district in 1592 AD and gave Narnaul the status of a district. Akbar gave the jagir of Narnaul to Shah Quli Khan and made him a HazariMansabdar.Shah Quli Khan got a large number of construction works done in Narnaul.¹⁹A mint was established in Narnaul during the time of Akbar. Akbar himself came to Narnaul with Todar Mal and Khwaja Shah Mansoor to improve casting techniques. The coin named "Jalali" was issued by Akbar from Narnaul itself. Apart from this, Akbar came to

Narnaul thrice to meet Sheikh Nizamuddin. Birbal, who was one of the nine gems of Akbar. There is a huge building called BirbalKaChhata in Narnaul which is now in ruins. Narnaul became an important city during the reign of Akbar. Narnaul Sarkar included the areas of Narnaul, Kanaud, Jhunjhunu and Sikar. At that time Narnaul was divided into 16 parganas whose vassals were mostly Rajputs.²⁰This situation continued till the reign of Aurangzeb. From 1556 AD to 1657 AD, the city of Narnaul developed exceptionally reached the peak of its glory and became one of the famous cities of India.

Historical Monuments of Narnaul

Tomb of Shah Wilayat:

Shah Wilayat tomb is located next to the tomb of Ibrahim Khan. It is a large mausoleum-cum-collegiate complex, encompassing a long tradition of architecture from the Tughlaq to the British period.²¹Its originality has been tarnished by later disruptions. The mausoleum and adjacent complex were originally constructed during the reign of Firoz Shah Tughlaq. Alam Khan Mewati built the eastern colonnade structure and the dome in 760 AD or 1357 AD. The older part has complete simplicity and grandeur, characteristics of the Central Pathan style. The arches have ogee curves. This tomb is controlled by the State Archeology and Museum Department, Haryana. It has five ogee arches on the southern and two ogee arches on the eastern side, supported by pillars. The eastern side has affixed an inscription of white marble. The pillars and the walls of the verandah are made of red bricks and plastered. Some portion of the plaster has been chipped off. The main entrance of the tomb is on the southern side.

There is a square tomb chamber. The interior of the mortuary hall is made of bricks and rubble. In the centre of the mortuary hall is a grave. The original grave of white marble stone is lying outside the mortuary hall near the main gate. On the original gravestone is a Persian inscription. According to this inscription, Salār and Ustā were the main masons, who were the residents of Narnaul.²²Hajar is also an Arabic Inscription, which is Allāh six times.²³The corners of the chamber are covered with arches in which beautiful squinches are carved. It has some paintings work, which are of much later date. The tomb is not in good condition and needs preservation and repair. On the top of the dome are petals of inverted lotus made of rubble and mortar from which the finial would have been erected but now it is missing.

Tomb of Jamal Khan

Jamal Khan was an Afghan noble and merchant. It can be dated to the Tughlaq period but the exact date of its construction is not known.²⁴ For a long time after its construction, this structure remained a haven for thieves etc. hence its present name ChorGumbad. Its plan is square, the corners of which are surmounted by circular turrets. The structure deviates from the conventional mausoleum of its time by rejecting a large entrance made in a rectangular panel. A shallow stringcourse separates the two levels and gives the impression of a two-storey structure. The entire plan is topped by a low dome, which, like the rest of the structure, is finished in plaster. Internally, it is a single location without any graves. Stairs lead to the upper level which opens onto an arched verandah extending around four faces. This verandah is visible from the outside and is indicative of two levels. ChorGumbad today stands in impressive isolation in the middle of the park popularly known as the 'Signboard of Narnaul'.

Tomb of Ibrahim Khan Sur:

Ibrahim Khan Sur was the grandfather of Sher Shah Sur and he was based in Narnaul as a minor officer of the Lodhis. After defeating Humayun in 1540AD, Sher Shah ordered the construction of his grandfather's tomb (1538-46 AD) under the supervision of Abu BakrKindi, son of Shaikh AdmadNiyagi. This tomb has a square plan built during the Lodi period. The main entrance is a beautiful and structural element in itself. This is the only mausoleum in Narnaul which has an eastern entrance. This tomb is built on a high platform where there are stairs to reach it. The greater part of its mass is presented in a pleasing contrast of brown and red stone, with relatively little use of red and red stone. Each of its four facades has a similar outline with a tall central archway containing a rectangular opening. On either side of this archway are small arched niches and openings arranged in pairs in two tiers to form the famous double-tiered imitation. This group is topped by a shallow dome with four pillared chhatris, one at each corner of the square. The roofline is further enlivened by the guladasta that emerges from the archway of the façade below. A merlon parapet ultimately binds the entire pyramidal structure. The interior is a large domed enclosure, repeating the exterior color scheme. Above the main dome is a lower dome, which rests on an octagonal drum. At the top of the dome, there is a plinth made of rubble and mortar surmounted by inverted lotus petals. The tomb of Ibrahim Khan is situated in the middle of the floor with two tombs of family members on either side. The stone carvings on the southern and western

sides are very structural elements. It is a protected monument of the Archaeological Survey of India.²⁵

Tomb of Shah Quli Khan:

Shah Quli Khan was the governor of Narnaul for 42 years.²⁶ First of all, he built his tomb. This is a good example of architecture. It was constructed in 1574–75AD, about 25 years before the death of its patrons. AbulFazal credits him with the restoration of the Mughal dynasty and places him second only to Bairam Khan. Firstly, he received royal support when he wounded the Sur general Hemu, thereby preventing the collapse of the Mughals soon after Akbar acceded to the throne.

This tomb is located in a large walled enclosure, with an entrance in its southern wall. The gateway itself is a beautiful structure, locally called the 'Tripolia Gate.' According to the inscription on it, this gate was built about a decade after the tomb, i.e. in 1588-89 AD.²⁷ It is a three-storey building, with slightly sloping walls of rubble, covered with a thick layer of plaster. The interior and exterior of the entrance are decorated with pleasing designs.

This tomb stands on an octagonal platform. Each side measures 11.5 meters and contains two inscriptions on red sandstone. This reveals the date of construction of the tomb, which is 1574-75 AD. The tomb is also octagonal, each side measuring 5.2 meters outside and 3.25 meters inside. On each face of the tomb, there is a semi-octagonal recess covered by a pointed arch. Except for the southern door, all three doors are covered with lattices, which provide light to the interior. The remaining space on each face is divided into panels filled with designs carved in red sandstone. The octagonal structure is topped by a white low dome. The dome is crafted from lime plaster and placed in complete isolation without supporting elements. This plan is very different from the octagonal type built by the Lodi and Sur kings.

The interior of the mausoleum contains six marble tombs. The soffit of the vaulted ceiling is decorated with designs painted in red and green. The attractive appearance of the mausoleum is due both to its pleasant proportions and the combination of colors, i.e. the brown of its body, the red of the design and the white of the dome. It is a protected monument.²⁸

JalMahal :

JalMahal was built by Shah Quli Khan near his grave. The entrance to the palace is from the north through a gatehouse, with rooms for guards, over a bridge supported on sixteen pointed spans.²⁹ It opens onto an arched passageway leading to an AnandaMandapam.

Construction of the tank and pavilion began in 1590–91 and was completed two years later. It is a trademark of Mughal architecture, called the "Second Kausar" (a pool in heaven). It is a two-storey structure situated in the middle of a large tank. The building is a square of side 17 m, with a central square room of side 5.9 m surrounded by a 3.9 m verandah. There is a square room of side 2.5 meters at each corner.³⁰

The domed ceiling of the central chamber has designs painted in harmonious colors, which still exist. Stalactites are visible on the ceiling of the central chamber. There are traces of painted decoration on the verandah ceiling as well. The corner chambers are in two storeys within the same height. Four staircases, two each on the north and south sides, provide access to the upper floor. There is an inscription on the northern façade, which has partly been removed. According to this inscription, JalMahal was constructed during the reign of Akbar in 1590-91 AD. The tank was completed in 1592-93 AD. At each corner of the building is a square dome supported on octagonal sandstone pillars. In the centre of the terrace is an octagonal platform with stairs which is covered by a large dome. It was probably used for sitting and enjoying the cool breeze.

ChhattaRaiBalMukundDas :

RaiBalMukund Das was a resident of Narnaul and was working in the service of Shahjahan. BalMukand Das was the Diwan of Narnaul during the reign of Shahjahan. He was a simple servant of Asif Jah at the beginning of his career, but being a man of good sense and courage as well as honesty, he became the Governor of Narnaul in time. He was very generous and his subjects were always happy with him. He built his mansion and inn in the centre of the city. Local people call it "Birbal's hive". It is wrong. Birbal had nothing to do with this monument. This was the residential mansion of RaiMukand Das. It is a grand structure. The five-storey mansion stands on a high platform, with small rooms on its sides. These rooms may have been servants' quarters. This platform gives a grand appearance to the hive.

A flight of stairs in the western wall of the platform leads to the terrace on which the mansion stands. The interior of this mansion is divided into two parts: men's quarters and women's quarters. The marble pillars in the verandah have square bases. Water was supplied from a well outside the mansion. It was cool in summer and comfortable in winter. A water pool and slopes in the hall helped justify the summer heat.

The curtain wall around has air openings. The prisoners were accommodated in corner rooms on this floor in case of rain. The main structure on this floor is the jharoka on the southern wall. The balcony has a rectangular cradle and a curved roof above it. The balconies feature decorative Arabic designs.³¹ All the pillars on the lower floor are of marble and the lintel pillars of the ceiling in this hall are of wood, probably to reduce the weight on the vaulted ceiling of the entrance hall. Rubble was the main construction material. The entire building is made of plaster.

Sarai of RaiMukandDas :

This Sarai is located on the northern edge of the city. It was built by RaiMukand Das. During the medieval period, Narnaul was a commercial centre on the Delhi-Ajmer route.³² It is a strong, fortress-like construction and this explains why it was being used by the 'rebels' as their headquarters in 1857.³³

The entrance of the Sarai has very attractive features; it has a curved archway. Two chambers with latticed or stone perforated screens over the windows were used, one on each side. There is a wooden door with an iron rod to protect the caravan. There are stairs on the western side of the entrance, which are closed by a wooden gate. There is an inscription on the northern wall of this entrance. According to the inscription,³⁴ the supervisors of this Sarai were Mehta Puran Mal and Hari Das in 1631-32 AD for providing facilities to caravans through Narnaul. The date of its construction and the name of its owner are written in this inscription.

Baoli of Mirza Ali Jan Ki :

On the western edge of Narnaul city is Mirza Ali Jan Ki Baoli. This baoli forms a large complex, known as "Mirza Ali JanKaTakht". The entrance gate of the Baoli is very impressive. It is like a two-storey structure and is arched. The first floor is an arcaded pavilion and the second floor is pillared, covering an area of 6.9 m x 2.5 m and 11 m. The main gate is in the north direction and the octagonal well is in the south direction. Stairs on both sides lead to the first floor. There are 11 stairs on each side, measuring 1.22 m by 46 cm and 20.3 cm high. The first floor contains arcaded pavilions; its pillars are octagonal. There are stairs on both sides of the second floor. At the end is a throne-pillared pavilion. Each pillar measures 0.36 meters square and is carved. It is made of black stone.

In front of the baoli is an octagonal tank 3 meters on each side, 1.3 meters deep, with a fountain in the centre. A waterfall system was adopted on both sides of the stairs. The baoli

has a rectangular reservoir. We see only 16 stairs to reach the reservoir. There is an arched pavilion on either side of the reservoir. There is an octagonal well of 3-meter side at the southern end. There are two long inscriptions on this stepwell; these are pasted at such inaccessible places. The letters in the lower inscription have been erased. The second inscription is on red sandstone that is visible on the terrace, in which the name of Emperor Akbar Padshah is visible. This stepwell was built between 1556-1607AD.

In conclusion, it can be said that Narnaul has a very important place in history but in the time and circumstances its history was not highlighted that much but it is a requirement to highlight the history of Narnaul. The monuments of Narnaul discussed above are very impressive and important. The conditions of the sites and monuments discussed in the article reflect the general attitude of people. History, as a discipline that connects the past to the present, is concerned with the handing down of tradition. The monuments of Narnaul are linked to our past and our sympathy towards them reflects our historical understanding. The administration has provided statutory protection to some structures but some buildings and their surrounding areas are becoming victims of illegal encroachment and vandalism. The monuments of Narnaul also have great importance in history, but in comparison to other cities, Narnaul was not given as much importance as it needed to be given, yet through this research paper we want to give the message that these important monuments of Narnaul should be preserved. This should be done so that we can further increase the importance of Narnaul for the future.

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